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## Haig: Trusted Defender of An Embattled President

The General  
And His Record — I

Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Ronald Reagan's choice to be America's next secretary of state, has had an extraordinary career in public service, one that has repeatedly put him at the center of the biggest political storms of recent American history.

Although Haig is a controversial selection for the Reagan Cabinet, his career has given him one indisputable credential. The president-elect could have found only one other American with comparable personal experiences to take over the State Department. That other person is Henry Kissinger, whom the Reagan camp rejected as too controversial.

That Haig should be acceptable when Kissinger is not illustrates one of the general's most striking qualities, his ability to win the favor of other people. Those ultraconservatives in the Republican Party who rejected Kissinger made Kissinger's protege and former sidekick, Haig, their first choice for the State Department job. But he was also Kissinger's first choice. And Richard Nixon's. And Leon Jaworski's.

On the other hand, Haig is decidedly not the preferred choice of most Democrats in the Senate. Senate Democratic leaders have already promised to closely scrutinize the Haig nomination before voting on his confirmation. The Democrats, though, are now the minority party; Republicans will control the full body and the Foreign Relations Committee, and may be able to push the Haig nomination through the confirmation process relatively quickly.

Because of his involvement in the Indochina war, the wiretapping at the beginning of the first Nixon administration, the Watergate affair at the end of the Nixon presidency and other controversial episodes, a thorough Senate inquiry into Haig's past would be a drawn-out affair. Reagan, however, has indicated a desire to swear in his entire Cabinet on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

Today The Washington Post begins a series of articles on Haig's past, describing events that are likely to raise questions during the hearings and debate on Haig's nomination. In this installment, Haig's role in the Watergate period is reviewed.

Haig spent nearly 16 months as President Nixon's chief of staff. During that period, the White House devoted most of its efforts to defending Nixon from the charges of John Dean that he obstructed justice. Nixon spent long hours on his own defense during those months. But White House logs and accounts of dozens of former White House aides indicate that Haig spent even more time defending the president than Nixon did himself.

In May 1973, when Nixon realized that his two most trusted aides — H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman — were going to be forced to resign because of their involvement in the Watergate affair, he turned to Haig. The general had been Kissinger's deputy at the National Security Council for the first two years of the Nixon administration, and was Army vice chief of staff on May 4, 1973, when the White House announced that Haig would be an "interim" chief of the presidential staff.

Haig was a favorite inside the Nixon White House. Just a week before he was asked to take over Haldeman's job, Haig had been the subject of an approving conversation in the Oval Office between Haldeman and Nixon. The topic under discussion was apparently one of the sensitive episodes that fell under the "Watergate" rubric, the trial in California of Daniel J. Ellsberg, the man who leaked the Pentagon Papers.

Haig did a great job out there, Haldeman told Nixon, according to a previously unpublished transcript of the tape recording of this conversation made by Nixon's automatic taping device. Nixon agreed with this assessment of Haig's testimony at the trial, where the general had been used as a prosecution witness to rebut testimony offered in Ellsberg's defense.

At the time Haldeman and Nixon talked, they and Haig were three of a tiny circle of men who knew that the Nixon White House had ordered 17 wiretaps on government officials and journalists' private telephones in the early months of the administration — a fact that finally became public knowledge five days later during the same Ellsberg trial. As a trusted confidant, Haig was unable to focus exclusively on policy matters as Nixon had hoped.

Instead, "Watergate" became Haig's preoccupation from the moment he arrived at the White House. One of his first acts was to ask the Pentagon's general counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt, to join the White House staff to deal with accusations against Nixon growing out of the Watergate affair. Haig, Buzhardt, lawyer Leonard Garment and Nixon's two principal speechwriters quickly went to work preparing a "national security" rationale for the wiretapping and other questionable activities that the presi-